

Child and Family Services Update

Friday, May 31, 2002

Here's That Budget Thing Again!

By Richard Anderson

You must be awfully tired of reading in the papers, hearing on the radio, and seeing on television that the state budget is in trouble again, and wondering how this will impact your part of the world. You are in prestigious company. I know the Governor, legislators, and many others are with us in wishing that this would end soon. However, this appears to be an economic trend that occurred because of the tragic events of 9-11 that has not yet crested. And nobody knows when it will.

We have had many good years in this state, and, even in the current crisis, we are doing better than many of our counterparts. I realize that our relative comparison with other states doesn't make us feel much better about the whole thing. It's what happens to us and to those near and dear to us that matters.

I wanted to give you an update from the last message sent to you, when we last had decreases in this year's and next year's budgets. Each time I thought I had a message to send, the context of the message changed. Well, it keeps changing, so I decided I should at least let you know that something is going to happen (as though you hadn't figured that out already) but we still don't know exactly what. We do know that the state is another 1.5 million dollars (oops, as of this morning that is 163 million dollars) deeper in deficit than when we went through the last decreases in the budget, after the recent legislative session.

The decisions to be made on the next decreases for fiscal year 2003, which begins this July, are to be made in a June 26 special session of the legislature (this was the date set as of last week). All that has happened to date is that the divisions were asked to show what a couple of possible scenarios of decreases would do to the agencies' ability to provide services. Whatever potential decreases there are will be spread evenly across the state. We at the state office will take the same level of decrease that any region will be asked to take. I realize that some of you read and hear the potential of state layoffs. A top priority will be to protect our staffing as much as we can. We will keep you informed on the outcome of all of this once we know.

Mentoring Conference

By Jerna Mitchell

Mentoring is one of the most exciting ways to learn. It gives learners the opportunity to watch successful workers perform their tasks and it creates an environment not only for learning, but also for achieving success. Mentoring has been occurring throughout the state of Utah since Child and Family Services began and has helped create success for many workers. Supervisors are the unsung heroes of mentoring in Child and Family Services. Without a formal mentoring process or program they have

created a mentoring system that has been working well. They have guided their staff through learning to do their jobs, through partnering with other agencies, and through creating safety for children and families.

On June 4th and 5th mentors from across the state will gather to kick off a formal mentoring program. The materials for this conference are a compilation of successes, activities, and mentoring experiences that are already occurring throughout the state. As we engage in this process you will probably discover that much of the formal program is exactly the same or very similar to the informal mentoring that has been naturally occurring. A formalized Mentoring Program gives everyone in the agency equal opportunity to use tried and true mentoring methods, skills, and activities.

This conference will be followed by Regional Mentoring Conferences. These conferences will celebrate the mentoring successes of regions and structure the mentoring process in a way that works for the region. The mentoring process will begin with Practice Model tools and skills, as we are just completing the Practice Model Training Initiative. This is just the beginning. New employees, and experienced employees wishing to increase their skill level, will eventually be able to access formal mentoring in any area for which they feel the need for added support.

Part of the development of a formal mentoring program is continuing to learn what is working. As you experience success in mentoring we encourage you to share those experiences with others. We welcome ongoing input on what is working, what needs to be improved, and additions that can be made to make the formal mentoring program more effective.

Good luck in your ongoing mentoring experience in Child and Family Services.

Senator Dan Eastman Goes On A Qualitative Case Review

By Richard Anderson

Senator Dan Eastman was a reviewer this past month in the Northern Region's Qualitative Case Review. Can you imagine what it was like for Kathleen Lincoln, Foster Care Worker in Ogden, to have the Director and a Senator review your work? Kathleen would probably say it was not pleasant. Kathleen was great!

Senator Eastman is the Co-Chair of the Child Welfare Legislative Oversight Panel. He has now had the opportunity to really see the practice changes we are implementing. He has also become aware of the large effort that is needed to support the improvements required in the Performance Milestone Plan.

A large thank you is owed to Senator Eastman for taking the time to really get to know some of the work that is currently being done in Child and Family Services.

Case Workers Reach Out To The Media

By Mary Steck

Foster Care Worker **Stephanie Stewart**, from Northern Region, was interviewed on National Public Radio last week. Richard Wexler, a national commentator, said, "I thought your caseworker did very well on NPR's Talk of the Nation Wednesday. I know the foster parent on the program from Maine was impressed." If you would like an actual transcript e-mailed to you, please contact me for a copy.

Also, reporter Jill Atwood from KSL TV followed **Cami Rimington** and **Tracey Dalby** for several days to put her story together on what it's like to be a CPS worker. KSL ran this story on Wednesday, May 22 on the news at 10 o'clock news, then another few minutes the next day on the 5 o'clock news.

We would like to thank these workers for the excellent job they did in representing the agency, our work, and themselves.

Children Need Their Visits With Parents

By Richard Anderson

Ideally, if we had the resources, I would like to see every child in our care seeing his or her parents every day, if it would not be harmful to the child.

I see a troubling trend in what we call treatment for parents. Visitation with children seems to be withheld as a motivator for parents to make changes or, sometimes, as a punishment for not making adjustments. I have seen these directives occur in court orders and also in service plans. If a parent fails a urinalysis test or doesn't follow through with a part of the plan, then visits are denied. I am not aware of the level of this happening, but we need to really look closely at the outcome for children. The most severe punishment in denying the visit is almost always to the child.

Children have a right to have ongoing access to their parents. Visitation is to be encouraged and facilitated at the highest frequency we can make available. In the 2001 General Session of the Utah State Legislature the following statute was enacted. Even with such a law in place we still have requests in courts for denying visits due to something that does not rise to the level of "a preponderance of evidence of real harm or substantiated potential harm to the child." As you will see, the "adjudicated parent" is the reference to the families we serve. We should not be requesting in court, or placing on service plans, denial of visitation for any other reason than what is stated in the law. The visit itself must be clearly seen as bringing "real harm to the child" or "substantiated potential harm." Other than this, children should not be punished by not having visits with their parents, even if the parent is failing the service plan and the court order. It is clear that if we fail to adhere to this statute and policy then the system may be inflicting abuse on a child.

Utah Code Ann.

30-3-32. Parent-time -- Intent -- Policy -- Definitions.

(1) It is the intent of the Legislature to promote parent-time at a level consistent with all parties' interests.

(2) Absent a showing by a preponderance of evidence of real harm or substantiated potential harm to the child:

(a) it is in the best interests of the child of divorcing, divorced, or adjudicated parents to have frequent, meaningful, and continuing access to each parent following separation or divorce;

(b) each divorcing, separating, or adjudicated parent is entitled to and responsible for frequent, meaningful, and continuing access with his child consistent with the child's best interests; and

(c) it is in the best interests of the child to have both parents actively involved in parenting the child.

(3) For purposes of Sections 30-3-32 through 30-3-37:

(a) "Child" means the child or children of divorcing, separating, or adjudicated parents.

(b) "Christmas school vacation" means the time period beginning on the evening the child gets out of school for the Christmas or winter school break until the evening before the child returns to school, except for Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day.

(c) "Extended parent-time" means a period of parent-time other than a weekend, holiday as provided in Subsections 30-3-35(2)(f) and (2)(g), religious holidays as provided in Subsections 30-3-33(4) and (16), and "Christmas school vacation."

Amended by Chapter 255, 2001 General Session

Practice Model And ASFA

By Linda Wininger

In 1997 the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) was passed and became a Federal Law. Compliance to ASFA is what the Federal Child Welfare Services Review (CWSR) that will culminate with the onsite visits in April 2003 measures. Perhaps some of you have wondered how we will stack up in this review given the emphasis that Utah is placing on Practice Model and the lack of concentration that ASFA has received. This article will show how the Practice Model and ASFA compare.

The philosophy of ASFA can be summarized as follows:

The safety of children is the paramount concern that must guide all child welfare services.

Foster care is a temporary setting and not a place for children to grow up.

Permanency planning efforts should begin as soon as a child enters the child welfare system.

The child welfare system must focus on results and accountability.

Innovative approaches are needed to achieve the goals of safety, permanency, and well-being.

Here are the principles and key elements of “good practice in child welfare” according to ASFA:

- **Child-focused:** the safety, permanency, and well-being of children are the leading criteria in all child welfare decisions.
- **Family-centered:** children, parents, and extended family members are involved as partners in all phases of engagement, assessment, planning, and implementation of case plans.
- **Strengths-based:** practices emphasize the strengths and resources of children, biological and extended families, and their communities.
- **Individualized:** case plans are individualized to address the unique needs of the child and family to appropriately address needs for safety and permanency.
- **Culturally competent:** problems and solutions are defined within the context of the family’s culture and ethnicity.
- **Comprehensive:** services address a broad range of family conditions, needs, and contexts.
- **Community partnership oriented:** planning and implementation of case plans are undertaken in partnership with staff and agencies from different systems who together make a formal commitment to provide the services and supports the child and family need.
- **Outcomes-based:** there are measurable outcomes for services regarding the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

Sound like our Practice Model? Sure does to me, and thank goodness! And because of that we should do well in the CWSR. The work that you are doing right now is the work that will be evaluated in the onsite reviews.

If you have any questions, drop me an email at lwininge@hs.state.ut.us.

How Do We Compare?

By Carol Miller

During a recent meeting I attended with our state administration, region directors, milestone coordinators, and key staff from the Office of Services Review (OSR) and The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group (The Child Welfare Group), our director (in his infinite wisdom) began the meeting by asking The Child Welfare Group for an overall assessment of where Utah's child welfare system is at this point. (Please keep in mind that The Child Welfare Group is involved with child welfare systems all over the

country.) I was so excited about what I heard them say that I wanted to run back to my office and share their insights with you.

- Unlike many states, Utah has a rational plan for improvement (our Performance Milestone Plan). Many other states have pieces of a plan, but not an entire plan like we do and our system is clearly moving forward.
- We have great leadership and have been lucky to retain continuity when leadership has changed.
- We've achieved most milestone tasks to date (approximately 70 percent), and we should see better achievement in the year to come.
- We are outcome focused, with the ability to look at outcomes with the use of a sophisticated information system (SAFE).
- Our Attorneys General and Guardians ad Litem are an asset as we are one of a few states in the nation to have these partners.
- Even though budget is a real concern right now, our caseloads are low compared with those seen in other states.
- We have great foster parents.
- Our regions have local autonomy, which enables them to deal with issues specific to their region.
- Training on the Practice Model has largely been completed for workers to date, with training for foster parents currently being piloted.
- We are showing progress in our scores in the Qualitative Case Reviews (QCRs).
- Compared with other states, we have very little predatory press due to lack of competition within the state. (I know, it doesn't feel like that when wearing our shoes. Just imagine how it must feel in other states!)
- With regard to the lawsuit, there is little conflict between the plaintiffs, the defendants, and the court monitor. The plaintiffs are very quiet, maybe because there is no controversy in findings as we work with our court monitor.
- Other states would love to be where Utah is right now as the federal Child and Family Services Reviews look at many of the same things as the QCRs.
- Staff generally support the Practice Model. There is less resistance to the Practice Model and broad progress being made in implementing the Practice Model as we are seeing practice being done this way. We also have a broader partnership with community partners and greater foster parent involvement.
- Child and Family Teams are beginning with CPS, and families are talking about having a better level of involvement in their service planning.
- We are ready for the next step in improving our practice by strengthening our mentoring/coaching program.
- Our general strength is openness to feedback.

We want to say thanks to all of you for your hard work and commitment to children and their families. It is because of you that we are achieving our goals and moving our child welfare system forward to be one of the best in the country. And the people who benefit the most from our efforts are the children and families of Utah.